

(ii) the identity of the soul that completes the formation and (iii) the moment of the individual soul's descent into the body. Whereas Porphyry has the mother's soul completing the formation and the offspring's soul entering at birth, Plotinus appears to envision the individual soul of the offspring descending at conception and completing the formation itself. Finally, (iv) allowing the mother's soul to take on the role of actualizer as he does, Porphyry provides a rather elegant solution to the problem of maternal resemblance within a one-seed theory, whereas Plotinus leaves this problem unsolved.

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Dirk Baltzly

## The World Soul in Proclus' *Timaeus* Commentary

The World Soul is one of the most formative ideas for subsequent Platonism. The general notion that there is a soul for the entire visible cosmos that renders it a unified, living creature clearly gripped the subsequent philosophical tradition and influenced even those who did not identify themselves as Platonists.<sup>1</sup> Plato lavished great detail upon the 'creation' of the World Soul in the *Timaeus*, but this had the effect of leaving his interpreters frankly puzzled on many points. Hence by the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD there was already a considerable literature on the proper interpretation of the World Soul in the *Timaeus*.<sup>2</sup>

Proclus' own conception of the World Soul is inseparable from this fact, for his conception is refined and articulated in response to interpretations of his Platonist predecessors. He accepts from them a set of puzzles about the meaning of Plato's remarks on the World Soul in the *Timaeus*. Much of his commentary is taken up with addressing these puzzles. So a general overview of the nature of the World Soul in Proclus' *Timaeus Commentary* is one that needs to be carefully extracted from his specific contributions to existing debates about the interpretation and significance of Plato's text. In general, Proclus is at pains to avoid fragmenting what he regards as the plural functions of a unified and unique World Soul into a plurality of souls. The World Soul is *one soul* and Proclus' approach labors to overcome what he sees as threats to this central idea. In pursuit of this goal he distinguishes the World Soul from Nature, which is distinct from and subordinate to it. On the other hand, he also distinguishes it from hypercosmic souls, though he denies that various passages Plato's *Timaeus* that were taken by his predecessors to be about hypercosmic souls are, in fact, to be read that way.

In what follows I will first consider why Proclus thinks we may be confident that there is a World Soul. I then investigate why he thinks we may be sure that there is *one* World Soul. It emerges from these investigations that the World Soul is best understood by reference to what it does. The third section considers how the nature of the World Soul is dictated by its function. The fourth section distinguishes it and its function from Nature, on the one hand, and hypercosmic souls on the other.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Reydam-Schils, G.: *Demiurge and Providence*.

<sup>2</sup> The classic study is Baltes, M.: *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios*, vol. 1.



## 1 The existence of the World Soul

The idea that the entire universe is animated by a single soul – though it is a prominent feature in Platonism – is not one that is obviously recommended by our experience. After all, we encounter animals, and perhaps to a lesser extent plants, whose salience to us as living things emerges from their contrast with the much more extensive backdrop of inanimate nature. On a walk in the bush we encounter an echidna foraging for ants by the side of a small gum tree. The echidna is pretty obviously an individual, self-motive creature with some kind of awareness. It moves – albeit with no great urgency – and it may perceive our presence, though they typically do not care much about human beings unless you do something silly. If you take the same walk many times over several years you will notice slower changes taking place in the gum tree too. Unlike the changing patterns of clouds in the sky, these changes strike us as changes in a single, continuous, organised being. Both these living things seem to stand out against the backdrop of the soil, the cliffs, boulders, and sky that also figure in your experience of that walk. Why would anyone suppose that all these things are, in fact, ensouled? And in particular, why would anyone suppose that there is a *single* soul that makes them all parts of a unique cosmic organism?

I will not speculate on what prompted *Plato* to embrace this extraordinary idea. I will simply observe that *Plato's* authority insures that Platonists such as Proclus would continue to embrace it. However, it is not simply the authority of *Plato's Timaeus* or *Laws* that recommends this idea to Proclus. An argument from his general theory of causation provides a ground for belief in the World Soul.

Proclus' *Platonic Theology* I 14, 63.9–25 reviews the argument of *Laws* X for the existence of the divine. The key premise that Proclus derives from this argument is that the changes that take place in the visible cosmos are amenable to rational understanding. This is particularly true of the motions of the heavens, but the fact that there are detectible patterns of inter-related changes even within the sub-lunary region shows that here too the world of changing things is subject to some level of rational understanding. While we would say that this makes them intelligible or understandable, Proclus would hesitate to describe these motions as *noêta* since *noêsis*, considered as a kind of thinking, demands a certain kind of object. Nonetheless, the fact that these changes in the visible cosmos admit of a kind of understanding entails that they stand in a certain *relation* to the proper objects of *noêsis*.

Proclus treats it as evident that what is understandable in this way *conforms* to intellect or is *kata noun*. Now, Proclus has views about the kind of thing that

intellect is and this is not the place to rehearse his reasons for these views. The argument for the existence of a World Soul presupposes his doctrine of a separate intellect. Let us grant for the sake of argument that the intellect to which the visible cosmos conforms in this way is radically different from the kind of thing that the cosmos itself is. Intellect is indivisible and highly unified, eternal and atemporal, unextended, unmoved and so on. The cosmos is, of course, divisible into distinct parts, spatially extended, and undergoes change in time and so on. Let us take these premises for granted, for certainly Proclus does – accepting them on the authority of the divine *Plato*.

The key step in the argument for the World Soul refers to the necessity of an *intermediary* between intellect as a separate cosmic principle and the cosmos of which it is the principle. At *Plat. Theol.* V 23, 85.16 Proclus claims to find it impossible to understand how the kind of Being had by intellect could be rendered coordinate with or communicated to the universe in a way that was unmediated. This is why Socrates insists in *Tim.* 30b3 that it is impossible for intellect to be present in (*paragenesthai*) anything apart from soul. This should not be understood as the claim that soul is prior to intellect, so that the latter's existence is predicated upon the former's. In fact, of course, it is exactly the other way around according to the Neoplatonists: intellect is ontologically prior to soul. It is rather the claim that the conformity of the visible cosmos with intellect that requires soul as an intermediary.

Intellective substance is undivided, uniform and eternal, that of bodies divided, pluralized and coexistent with temporal extension. Because of this they are diametrically opposed to one another and have need of a mean which is able to bring them together, one that is at once divided and undivided, complex and simple, eternal and generated. *Plato* makes the psychic order such [a mean, representing it as] at the same time intelligible and the first of things that come to be, eternal and in time, undivided and divided. So if the universe must come into being with intellect (*ennous*), there is also need of soul; for it is the receptacle of intellect and it is through it that intellect makes its appearance in the material substances (*onkos*) of the universe. It is not that intellect has need of soul. In that case it would be of lower status than soul. Rather, it is that bodies have need of soul if they are to participate in intellect.<sup>3</sup>

When we think about what is required for the sensible realm to conform to the intellectual first principles, we can be sure that there must be such a thing as World Soul.

<sup>3</sup> In *Tim.* I 402.15–28, trans. Runia, D. and Share, M.: *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. II, Book 2.



## 2 One World Soul – not a team effort

We will return to the nature of this psychic intermediary shortly. For the moment let us ask why intelligibility of the various changes that we see in the visible cosmos presupposes the existence of a *single* soul for the entire universe rather than a plurality of souls associated with the various parts of the universe.

To appreciate the force of this question, let's consider an alternative conception of the cosmic role of soul. One reading of the means whereby Aristotle's prime mover causes the motion of the sphere of the fixed stars (and the spheres nested below it) assigns a soul to the sphere (and perhaps to those individual nested spheres as well).<sup>4</sup> It is this soul that, taking the prime mover as an object of desire, imitates its unextended activity by moving its sphere in a circle. The motions of the celestial spheres, in turn, bring about changes in the sub-lunary region principally by the influence of the Sun and the Moon in ways that are basically mechanical. Since the sphere of the fixed stars encompasses all the subsequent celestial sphere and they, in turn, encompass the sub-lunary region, one could assign a coordinating role to the soul of the sphere of the fixed stars. It might be in virtue of this soul's mediation that the visible cosmos conforms (to an extent at least) to intellect. This coordinating soul of the celestial region could thus make a World Soul that animates the whole redundant. In fact, Proclus at one point takes this to be Aristotle's position: Aristotle assigns to the soul of the inerrant sphere the role that Plato gives the World Soul (*In Tim.* III 69.28–70.1).

Such a view clearly has its attractions. Suppose we followed Proclus' argument that the extent of the universe's conformity with intellect requires the mediation of a psychic order between the indivisible, uniform and eternal intellect on the one hand and the divisible, multi-form and temporal visible cosmos on the other. Confining that psychic order to the celestial region means that we do not have to reject as misleading the impression gained on our bushwalk – that there is a crucial difference between the animate echidna or gum tree and the inanimate cliffs and boulders. It is one thing to accept that the celestial spheres are great ensouled beings who mediate the intellectual order to matter. It is quite another to accede to the idea that the echidna, the gum tree and the boulder are all parts of a single cosmic creature animated by a single World Soul.

The first obstacle to such an account – at least from Proclus' point of view – is the text of Plato. *Tim.* 36e2–5 tells us that the soul was interwoven from the middle of the world's body on out in every direction to the outermost edge of heaven and, further, that it covers it from the outside as well. It would appear, then, that there

is no part of the universe to which the World Soul is not present. Thus, it cannot be the soul merely of a part of the universe – like the celestial region – but must be instead the soul of the entire universe considered as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, *Tim.* 33c3–34a1 pretty clearly attributes single organic body, as well as the unity of perception, that is characteristic of a single living creature to the universe as a whole. This life, unlike the life of an individual echidna, is wholly self-sufficient and happy. This self-sufficiency is, in Proclus' view, the fifth of the Demiurge's gifts to the visible cosmos.<sup>6</sup>

But Proclus could also appeal to philosophical considerations distinct from the authority of Plato's text. The argument is seldom spelled out explicitly, but Proclus generally subscribes to the ontological priority of wholes over their parts. This is not a wildly implausible view to hold and it is defended by some contemporary metaphysicians.<sup>7</sup> There is something appealing to the idea that (at least in some cases) the parts of a thing owe their existence as those very parts to their integration into the whole of which they are parts. However, the notion of wholeness that Proclus works with is not confined to the kinds of particular sensible things that we moderns tend to think of as examples of things that are wholes with parts – a motor car or a wombat, for instance. For Proclus, the unparticipated Form or paradigmatic cause, Wombat Itself, is a whole that is prior to the participated form or universal wombat-hood that constitutes the repeatable nature found in common across all individual wombats.<sup>8</sup> The latter is a whole-in-the-parts that exists in a manner that is associated with participation.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Proclus treats the ontological priority of the intelligible living being or *Autozōon* that serves as the paradigm for the visible universe as an example of the whole prior to the parts.

<sup>5</sup> Proclus concedes some ground to the 'Aristotelian' position subsequently in his *Timaeus Commentary*. He addresses a puzzle about why Plato's dialogue generates the sub-lunary gods from Ouranos and Gaia rather than from the World Soul and answers that while *Tim.* 36d8–e1 shows that the Demiurge framed all that is corporeal within the World Soul – and not merely the celestial region – nonetheless the World Soul illuminates the heavens primarily and only enlivens the sub-lunary region insofar as it is dependent upon the former. He reads the parallel between the human soul and the universe from the micro to the macrocosm. The situation is like our own, where the rational human soul is lodged in the head (*In Tim.* III 181.16–182.9).

<sup>6</sup> *In Tim.* II 5.23.

<sup>7</sup> Schaffer, J.: 'Monism: The priority of the whole', 31.

<sup>8</sup> For a succinct explanation of the distinction between participated and unparticipated Forms, see Steel, C.: 'Proclus', 645–647.

<sup>9</sup> Proclus, *Elem. Theol.* § 67.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Alexander (?), *Quaest.* 1.25, 40.8–23.



The intelligible Living Thing is inclusive of all the things [that come] after it, not as being constituted by them – it is a whole-prior-to-the-parts, not a whole-composed-of-parts – nor as being predicated of them – indeed, it is the *cause* of the many [...].<sup>10</sup>

When we combine Proclus' view of the ontological priority of the whole over the part with his more expansive notion of what things can be properly described as wholes, we arrive at a doctrine that might better be described as the ontological priority of the whole to the *partial* or perhaps a priority of the general to the more specific. This generalised holism manifests itself in the priority of the totality or wholeness of body to individual bodies and a corresponding priority of the soul of the entire universe to the souls of various parts of it.

To sum up then, we say that there is a single *corporeal* wholeness for the universe, as well as many other [wholes] dependent upon this single wholeness. And while there is a single *soul* of the universe, there are also many other souls after this one who, in conjunction with it, arrange the entire region in a manner that is undefiled.<sup>11</sup>

The plurality of 'other wholes' that are dependent upon the world's single and all-encompassing corporeal wholeness are 'universal things' like the spheres of the stars or the totalities of earth, air, fire and water.<sup>12</sup> The souls of the stars and planets are not *parts* of the World Soul in the same way in which, say, the sphere upon which Venus moves is a part of the total mass of the universe. Rather these divine souls are *sisters* to the single World Soul that the Demiurge creates.<sup>13</sup> This is why I said that Proclus' holism includes an expanded notion of what constitutes a whole and a corresponding range of ways in which the whole (or the general) is prior to the part (or the partial). Once we allow for this broad notion of wholeness, then Proclus' holism supports an argument to the priority of a single cosmic soul prior to the souls that animate the various parts of the universe.

### 3 The nature of the World Soul

Proclus' central idea about the nature of the World Soul follows more or less directly from his most basic argument for its existence. As we saw above, the intelligibility of the visible cosmos – its conformity with the hypostasis of

<sup>10</sup> In *Tim.* I 426.14–17, trans. Runia, D. and Share, M.: *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. II, Book 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Plat. Theol.* I 14, 68.17–21, my translation.

<sup>12</sup> See Baltzly, D.: *Proclus, Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. III, Book 3, Part I, 2–6.

<sup>13</sup> In *Tim.* III 184.24–9.

Intellect – requires the existence of something that mediates the undivided, uniform and eternal Being of intellect to the Being of bodies that is divided, pluralized and temporally extended.<sup>14</sup> The World Soul is that intermediary, in touch with both Intellect above and the visible cosmos below. Proclus is quite clear that this is the World Soul's defining feature:

The following is the defining feature of the World Soul – not that it is composed out of numbers (cf. *Tim.* 35b), nor that it is the result of such and such ratios (36b), nor that it is composed of circles (36c) of such and such a sort (for all these things and others are common characteristics of all souls, whether divine, daemonic or human) – rather [the defining feature of the World Soul] is that its essence (*ousia*) is an intermediary between the following extremes: the one cosmic Intellect and the entirety of the divisible Being that has come to be in the realm of bodies.<sup>15</sup>

The double-ringed 'structure' of the soul that the Demiurge creates in Plato's famous description in *Tim.* 35b4–36d7 is not what is distinctive about the soul of the universe.<sup>16</sup> This structure is common to all souls and doesn't distinguish the World Soul from them. Nor does playing the role of mediator between some body or other and some specific Intellect distinguish the World Soul from the divine souls of specific stars and planets. All divine souls – both the World Soul and the souls of the stars and planets are connected to Intellect.<sup>17</sup> Rather, the World Soul plays a specific intermediary role that is distinguished by the generality of the things between which it mediates.

For the extreme terms [between which the World Soul stands as an intermediate] are the simple, indivisible Being and the simple divisible Being in the realm of bodies – not the being of *some particular* bodies, but rather the divisible Being that pertains to *all* body. For surely the soul of the Sun is an intermediary between some particular indivisible being and some particular divisible being – not between indivisible Being considered indefinitely – nor is it [an intermediary between some particular indivisible being and] divisible Being in the realm of bodies in general. Assuming this first as the defining feature of the Cosmic

<sup>14</sup> In *Tim.* I 402.15.

<sup>15</sup> In *Tim.* II 141.8–14, trans. Baltzly, D.: *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. IV, Book 3, Part I.

<sup>16</sup> The word 'structure' appears in scare quotes of course since the soul is unextended and thus lacks a shape of the sort that is characteristic of objects extended in space. Literally speaking, it has no shape, but the shape that is symbolically ascribed to it conveys a great many insights according to the Neoplatonists.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Proclus, *Elem. Theol.*, §§ 182–184. Proclus actually distinguishes between souls that are gods existing in the psychic mode because they participate in *nous* and souls that perpetually accompany the gods and participate in a *nous* that is merely intellectual. This complication need not concern us here, I think.



Soul, the dialogue then takes the remaining features as things that follow given a soul of this sort, i.e. number, harmony and form.<sup>18</sup>

So the *metaphysical* role of the World Soul is primary and this role (putatively) explains why the Demiurge composes it from numbers, ratios, and the circles of the Same and the Different.

The role of the World Soul as an intermediary between indivisible Being in general and divisible Being in general also helps us to understand what has been the most popular aspect of Proclus' reading of Plato's psychogony. The text of *Timaeus* 35a1–8 has been regarded as problematic.

[a1] τῆς ἀμερίστου  
καὶ αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' ἔχούσης οὐσίας καὶ τῆς αὖ περὶ τὰ σώματα  
γιγνομένης μεριστῆς τρίτον ἐξ ἀφοῦν ἐν μέσῳ συνεκράσατο  
οὐσίας εἶδος, τῆς τε ταύτου φύσεως [αὖ περὶ] καὶ τῆς τοῦ  
[5] ἑτέρου, καὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' συνέστησεν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ τε ἀμερούς  
αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ σώματα μεριστοῦ· καὶ τρία λαβὼν  
αὐτὰ ὄντα συνεκράσατο εἰς μίαν πάντα ἰδέαν, τὴν θατέρου  
φύσιν δύσμεικτον οὖσαν εἰς ταῦτ' ὁναρμόττων βίᾳ.<sup>19</sup>

Most editors want to bracket αὖ περὶ in spite of the fact that all our manuscripts contain it since a) it seems hard to understand and b) is a likely candidate for diplography from line 1. This textual change invites an identification of Sameness and Difference with the Divisible and Indivisible kinds of Being introduced in the first clause. Now this would not be an *obviously* absurd thing for Plato to think, since the Indivisible kind of Being is associated with Forms. Forms are, of course, unchanging and always the same. Hence Indivisible Being could be regarded as more or less equivalent to Sameness. The Divisible Being is associated with bodies and these are always changing and hence to be identified with the Different. Of course this change to the text removes the mystery of one apparent repetition (αὖ περὶ) only by introducing another, for now 'καὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' συνέστησεν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ τε ἀμερούς αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ σώματα μεριστοῦ' seems redundant. What could it possibly add to what has just been said? Taylor, who accepted the emendation, had this answer to that question:

<sup>18</sup> In *Tim.* II 142.2–9, trans. D. Baltzly.

<sup>19</sup> *Tim.* 35a1–8 in the OCT text. a4 αὖ περὶ (περὶ) A F P Y Pr. Plut. Eus. Stob. : om. (bis) Sext. Emp., non vertit Cic. a5 ταῦτ' F: τὰ αὐτὰ Eus.: ταῦτα A P Y Stob.

This seems a repetition of what had already been said three lines above, but has a point if the object of the clause is to remind us that the Same and the Different of 4–5 are identical with the Indivisible and Divisible of a 5–6.<sup>20</sup>

This understanding of the Demiurge's psychogonic activity agrees with the general gist of Proclus' early Platonist predecessors. In the interpretations given by Crantor, Alcinoüs, Atticus and Plutarch of Chaeroneia, the central role in the mixing of the psychic 'stuff' is given to the divisible and indivisible forms of Being, with Sameness and Difference playing either a vague ancillary role related to the soul's movement or explicitly being equated with the divisible and indivisible Being. In addition to making this equation Plutarch also associated the kind of Being that is divisible in the realm of bodies with a pre-existing irrational soul.<sup>21</sup> This, of course, was obviously unacceptable to Proclus. His arguments against it, however, need to be accompanied by a positive account of what Plato was saying. Hence the need for a disambiguation of the difficult passage at *Tim.* 35a1–8.

Proclus' alternative is the reading that has, since Grube's influential paper, become the standard one for us too.<sup>22</sup> The words αὖ περὶ in line 4 indicate that the Demiurge now engages in the same mixing of divisible and indivisible kinds that he previously undertook in the case of Being but now with divisible and indivisible species of Sameness and Difference. The τρία that are subsequently combined are the Being, Sameness and Difference that result from the compounding of the divisible and indivisible kinds into an intermediate form. So soul is an intermediate between divisible and indivisible Being, as well as between divisible and indivisible Sameness, and finally a compound of divisible and indivisible Difference. No alternative that *equates* Sameness with the realm of the intelligible, changeless and indivisible or *equates* Difference with the realm of changing bodies is possible. The proponents of the equation mistake predominance for identity:

For if they were to say just the following – that Sameness *predominates* in things intelligible and indivisible, while Difference predominates in sensible and divisible things – then they would speak correctly. But if they said this – that indivisible things are *separate* from Difference – then they will be unable to grant Sameness to these things either, for the One *differs* from the Same. Likewise, [if they were to say] that Sameness was separate from divisible things, they would destroy the Being of these things, for if Being is in all things, then Sameness will be in all things too.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, A. E.: *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, 108–109.

<sup>21</sup> In *Tim.* II 153.25.

<sup>22</sup> Grube, G. M. A.: 'The Composition of the World Soul', 80–82.

<sup>23</sup> In *Tim.* II 156.1–8.



To suppose otherwise would be to ignore the Proclean axiom that all things are in all, but in each in a manner appropriate to that thing. Difference as much as Sameness is present in the intelligible order – albeit in a different way than the way in which Difference is present in other orders of being.

It is easy to get lost in the scholastic air of much of this debate. But the important point is that Proclus treats the three genera in the soul as explanatory principles and argues to a reading of Plato's text on that basis. If we confine Sameness to the realm of indivisible intelligibles and Difference to the realm of divisible bodies, then there are facts about each realm that cannot be explained.

So there are really two motivating principles in Proclus' philosophical methodology. The first is the most obvious and the most alien to our own methodology: the authority of Plato's text (and that of the *Chaldean Oracles*, the Orphic texts and the inspired Homer with whom Plato is in agreement). In the present context, this comes out as the presupposition that *whatever* Plato means in the thorny passage at *Tim.* 35a1–8, it must be true. The only question is precisely what he means.<sup>24</sup> The less obvious methodological principle is one that is perfectly familiar: the pattern of inference to the best explanation. In Proclus' argument for the existence of the World Soul, we have a phenomenon that needs explaining – the fact that the visible cosmos conforms to the paradigms in intellect (at least to some degree). This conformity requires mediation by something that is akin to both the paradigm and the copy in certain important respects. Similarly here in Proclus' account of the specific kind of intermediate nature that the soul has, we must disambiguate Plato's text by reference to the explanatory power of Sameness and Difference. When we reflect on things that cry out for explanation – i.e. the fact that Being differs from Sameness – we can see that these explanatory principles cannot be confined to the realms of Being and Becoming. If they are present in both, then World Soul as mediator between them must contain appropriately intermediate forms of Sameness and Difference, as well as of Being. So the ambiguity of the authoritative text at *Tim.* 35a1–8 is resolved through the familiar method of inference to the best explanation.

Above I quoted *In Tim.* II 142.2–9 where Proclus asserts that it is not the structure of the World Soul that distinguishes it from other encosmic souls, but rather the terms between which it stands as an intermediary. You might wonder how it is that the World Soul can play its particular mediating role, and other souls cannot, if they do not differ in any intrinsic way. To put the same point another way: if I tell you that what distinguishes relation R from relation R\* is the kind of relata that each is capable of holding between, then you might wonder whether

the difference in the possible relata does not presuppose some intrinsic difference in the nature of the two relations. Proclus' answer is that the intermediate is composed differently depending on which relata it binds:

Now, if we were to inquire what it is that makes this one single idea, not any old soul, but rather the cosmic soul, and moreover how it is that these ingredients constitute souls other than the World Soul in other instances, then we will answer that it is a matter of the universal (*holikos*) character of the genera that were assumed (for the Being, Sameness and Difference within the soul are not intermediate species between any old extreme terms, but of the universal Intellect and the universal corporeal nature, through which the cosmos is a living thing – something endowed with mind in virtue of indivisible kind and ensouled in virtue of the intermediate kind). Now, the predominance of Being [makes it the soul of the world, and not any chance soul], for this makes the soul divine, just as the predominance of Sameness alone makes a soul daemonic, and the predominance of Difference alone makes it partial or particular. Therefore a difference with respect to the extreme terms also makes for a difference in the intermediate ones and the mixture of the intermediates that is defined by the predominance of one of the things that have been mixed evidently brings about changes in the whole.<sup>25</sup>

So while the *structure*<sup>26</sup> – the existence of the portions corresponding to 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 27; the ratios inserted between these numbers; the double circle 'shape'; the opposite movement of the circles – of the various encosmic souls may be roughly the same, the ratios among the genera from which the psychic *ousia* is composed may differ between divine, daimonic and human souls. Thus Proclus not only provides a neat resolution of a puzzling text from Plato's *Timaeus*, he utilises his solution to that puzzle in order to develop an account of psychic composition that can be extended to answer a question that perhaps did not occur to Plato himself.

## 4 Above and below

In order to further understand what the World Soul does it will be helpful to distinguish it from the hypercosmic souls that are ontologically prior to it and the hypostasis Nature that comes after it.

Soul is, indeed, the intermediary between cosmic Intellect and the divisible Being that comes to be in bodies, but the latter is not to be equated with bodies or matter – considered either individually or as a whole. Rather, Proclus equates the

<sup>25</sup> *In Tim.* II 158.3–15.

<sup>26</sup> The shared structure is also what makes the human being a microcosm of the living cosmic creature; cf. *In Tim.* I 5.11–17.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Baltzly, D.: 'Plato's Authority'.



‘οὐσίας περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης μεριστῆς’ of *Tim.* 35a with *Nature* or *physis*. The *Timaeus* is, by Proclus’ lights, a work of *physiologia*. It is also a work in which the World Soul looms large. So right at the start he distinguishes the two. In doing so he illustrates further the crucial role of mediation and descent by degrees in his philosophy.

And intelligent soul and nature are two different things, for nature is what belongs to bodies, deeply embedded in them and existing as something inseparable from them, whereas soul is separable and is rooted within itself, and belongs at the same time to itself and to another – being ‘another’s’ by the participation of others in it, and ‘its own’ by its not sliding into what participates, just as the father of the soul is only ‘his own’ by being unparticipated.<sup>27</sup>

Proclus goes on to spell out a descent from a principle of the cosmos that is ‘just itself’ to that which is ‘merely other’. I summarise this five-term series introduced at in *Tim. I.* 11.1–2 and explained in lines 2–10 in the following table:

‘itself’	the intelligible and paradigmatic cause of all things to which the Demiurge looks in creating the cosmos; this is why Plato calls it the <i>Autozōon</i> or ‘Living-thing itself’
its own	the demiurgic mind that ‘remains within the character of <i>its own</i> according to its manner’ ( <i>Tim.</i> 42e5–6)
its own and another’s	soul since it is both within itself and also gives the light of a secondary life to another
what belongs to another (only)	nature that is inseparable from bodies
the other	the whole sensible world, in which there is separation and division of every kind

Systematic though it is, in Proclus’ characteristic way, this leaves the nature of Nature a bit opaque. What is this thing that comes after Soul?

My purpose here is not a lengthy exposition of Proclus’ theory of Nature.<sup>28</sup> It will be sufficient for the purposes of this chapter that we see roughly what it is and why its function is not one that could be undertaken by the World Soul. Proclus’ conception of Nature resembles Aristotle’s by virtue of being an *internal* source of both stability and development. Unlike Soul, Nature is in bodies and not ‘in itself’. It is, moreover, a first principle of changes that are subject to *rational understanding*. Hence the proximate sources of the rest and stability

<sup>27</sup> In *Tim.* I 10.24–31, trans. H. Tarrant.

<sup>28</sup> For a more thorough study, see Martijn, M.: *Proclus on Nature* and Lernould, A.: *Nature in Proclus*, 68–102.

that universal Nature coordinates can rightly be called *logoi* and it has become conventional to translate this Neoplatonic term of art as ‘rational-forming principles’. By virtue of possessing these *logoi* Nature ‘engenders and vivifies’ sensible things.<sup>29</sup> Though it engenders and enlivens bodies, Proclus takes Plato’s account of Nature to be of something *incorporeal*. In spite of the fact that it is incorporeal, Universal Nature’s *logoi* are said to be *in* bodies as a kind of immanent cause. Although incorporeal and thus indivisible, a *logos* or enmattered form ‘sends forth from itself the enmattered power like an exhalation (*phoē*) and this is a particular quality’<sup>30</sup>. The relation between the Universal Nature that bounds World Soul on its lower end and the plural natures of individual sensibles is described in the *Platonic Theology*:

Universal Nature envelops in unity the reason-principles (*logoi*) of all things, celestial and sub-lunary, and distributes its own powers to natures which, from Nature, become particularized relative to bodies (περὶ τὰ σώματα μερίζομεναις).<sup>31</sup>

So it appears that World Soul is adjacent – metaphysically speaking – to Universal Nature, where the latter should be understood as the unitary source of the plural rational-forming principles that, in turn, engender and vivify individual sensible things. These individual natures or *logoi* themselves seem to have a dual nature. On the one hand, they too are incorporeal things, but they send forth enmattered powers that we can identify with, say, the heat of this particular fire.

The interposition of Nature and its *logoi* between the World Soul and the world that it animates may seem odd to modern readers of Plato. After all, is it not characteristic of soul to be a self-moving origin of motion in other things? Surely this is the lesson of *Phaedrus* and *Laws*. Where does Plato sanction the idea of a Nature that is the proximate source of motion in bodies? Surely for a Platonist that should be the job of soul.

Stephen Menn has already discussed the problem that *Phaedrus* 245c5, ff. poses for the Neoplatonists.<sup>32</sup> Here Socrates seems to say that (1a) self-motion is characteristic of soul and further to this (1b) it is the source or origin of motion for other things. As a consequence of its self-motive nature, it is said that 2) ‘all soul is immortal’ (245c5). Now, Proclus (and Hermias) do not think that *all* soul is in fact immortal – only the rational parts of the soul are. Hence they narrow the range of motion under discussion in (1a). What Plato really means, they suppose, is the motion characteristic of rational souls – which is of course reversion or

<sup>29</sup> In *Tim.* I 10.20.

<sup>30</sup> In *Tim.* II 25.8–9.

<sup>31</sup> *Theol. Plat.* III 2, 8.14–17.

<sup>32</sup> Menn, S.: ‘Self-motion and reflection’.



*epistrophê*. A narrowing of the sense in which soul is a self-mover in (1a) brings about a corresponding narrowing of the scope of the word 'all' in (2): it is only rational souls that are immortal.

I think that the role of Nature in mediating the World Soul's life and motion to the sensible realm should be seen in this context too. The narrowing of the kind of motion that is proper to soul in (1a) opens up space for a subordinate and auxiliary cause of the motions discussed in (1b). The World Soul does not directly bestow its characteristic motion upon the visible cosmos taken as a whole. After all, reversion is a single very special kind of non-extended quasi-motion that is imitated by the motion of a sphere on its axis.<sup>33</sup> But when we focus upon the visible cosmos, we notice all kinds of motions and changes. So there must be some 'principle of multiplication' that falls between the one and the many. This principle of plurality is Nature. In short, Proclus distinguishes Nature from the World Soul because, having narrowed the range of motions for which soul can be an origin, *something else* must be posited as the source of those motions that are not images of the distinctively psychic motion of *epistrophê*. This something else must be like soul but distinct, and superior to passive matter. It is Nature.

If Universal Nature is immediately ontologically posterior to the World Soul, what is immediately prior? One natural thought would be that prior to the World Soul must be the 'cosmic intellect'. After all, Proclus himself says that the World Soul is distinguished by having an *ousia* that is intermediate between the cosmic intellect and the entirety of divisible being.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, this accords with some of Proclus' general remarks on the connection between Soul and Intellect. In his initial comments on *Tim.* 34b3–4 (where the Demiurge places the soul in the middle of the universe) Proclus writes:

[H]e introduced the soul into the universe and filled all things with life (though different things have different kinds of life) and made intellect preside over soul itself. Because of this fact, soul is connected with its own source (for the World Soul is connected with the intelligibles by participating in intellect).<sup>35</sup>

This supposition, however, leaves another element in Proclus' ontology out of the picture: hypercosmic souls. These are souls that are not the souls of any body. The World Soul, by virtue of being the soul of the cosmos, is related to a body. So it is not a hypercosmic soul. Moreover, given the priority of the unparticipated to the participated in Proclus' metaphysics, it would seem inevitable that every

hyperc cosmic soul is prior to any encosmic one. After all, every soul that is the soul of some body is participated in by that body. Thus it would seem that hypercosmic souls in general will be prior to the World Soul as well since it is the soul of some body. So it might appear that, just as Nature insulates the World Soul from the totality of corporeal nature below it, so too a hypercosmic soul is intermediate between World Soul and *Nous*. Proclus' apparent endorsement of an immediate connection between intellect and the World Soul in passages like the one quoted immediately above might be only loose talk.

The argument of the preceding paragraph may well have been what prompted Iamblichus to read parts of Plato's *Timaeus* as introducing an additional hypercosmic soul prior to the World Soul (*Tim.* frs. 50 and 54, ed. Dillon). At least as Proclus presents his predecessors, Iamblichus was opposed in this interpretation by Porphyry who read the *Timaeus*' psychogony as concerning only the World Soul. This is not to say that Porphyry rejected the idea of a hypercosmic soul entirely. He instead identified the Demiurge with a hypercosmic soul (*In Tim.* frs. 42 and 53, ed. Sodano).

Proclus' teacher, Syrianus, seems to have sided with Porphyry's rejection of Iamblichus' reading of *Tim.* 34b3–4 and 36b6–7, though he also rejected Porphyry's view on the identity of the Demiurge. His reading of the World Soul is aptly described by Klitenic Wear as a 'portmanteau view' that attempts to combine what he regarded as important in the views of both his predecessors.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, the *Timaeus* does not discuss a hypercosmic soul. On this matter, Porphyry was right. On the other hand, Syrianus posited a 'hyperc cosmic aspect' (*ti*) for the World Soul through which it is connected to Intellect (*In Tim.* II 105.29–31 = Syrianus *In Tim.* fr. 13, ed. Klitenic Wear).

Proclus endorses his teacher's position explicitly in his commentary on *Tim.* 34b3–4 – the passage that serves as the first occasion for Iamblichus' attribution to Plato of a two-soul theory. When he turns to *Tim.* 36b7–8, he seems to amplify Syrianus' solution by introducing the idea that the World Soul is bi-formed (*duo-eidês*). The two strips into which the Demiurge divides the single row of psychic *ousia* (*Tim.* 36b6–7) do not signify two distinct souls – one hypercosmic, the other encosmic – as Iamblichus supposed. Rather, in Plato's text there is but one soul – the World Soul – and it is both a monad and a dyad. That is to say, it somehow unites in a single existence the apparently incompatible natures of the encosmic and the hypercosmic.

[I]t is in this respect that the essence of the soul differs from intellectual essence: while the one is uni-form and antecedently comprehends all the forms in a monadic manner, the

<sup>33</sup> *In Tim.* II 92.10–95.12.

<sup>34</sup> *In Tim.* II 141.11.

<sup>35</sup> *In Tim.* II 103.14–19; cf. 105.13–15.

<sup>36</sup> Klitenic Wear, S.: 'Syrianus' Teaching on the Soul'.



other is dyadic and has the same *logoi* in the manner of discursive thought and opinion. They are present in the first mode in the circle of the Same, but in the other mode in the circle of the Different, for the soul is both a monad and a dyad.<sup>37</sup>

Proclus explains this miraculous combination of apparently incompatible features by reference to the role of the World Soul as intermediary between the intelligible and sensible realms. He recalls the argument of *Tim.* 31c2–32b4 in which the two intermediate elements of air and water are needed to establish a geometric proportion between the opposed elements of fire and earth. Because the elements are *corporeal* things, distinct from one another, it takes two distinct kinds of body – air and water – to bind them in a geometric proportion. But to bind the sensible realm to the *incorporeal* realm of intellect, we don't need to distinct intermediate terms. One term with a dual nature will suffice. That single intermediary is the World Soul and it is able to unify the sensible and intelligible realms, making the former a visible image of the latter, by virtue of the fact that it is bi-formed.<sup>38</sup> The nature of this argument for the unity of the bi-formed World Soul reinforces the argument of section 3: according to Proclus, the defining feature is its role as an intermediary and it is this metaphysical role that determines what we say about its nature.

If the World Soul has a hypercosmic aspect, as Syrianus and Proclus suppose, then perhaps there is no need for us to suppose that it is itself the product of a distinct hypercosmic soul. After all, it can be connected to *nous* through its hypercosmic aspect. What need then is there to posit a hypercosmic soul over and above the World Soul with its hypercosmic aspect?

This question takes us into the difficult issue of the demarcation between universal soul or the hypostasis of soul and the World Soul. Klitenic Wear supposes that Proclus' teacher, Syrianus, conflated the World Soul with the hypostasis or universal soul.<sup>39</sup> Proclus' view on this matter is harder to fathom. He undoubtedly endorses Syrianus reading of Plato's *Timaeus* against that of Iamblichus: there is no need to read *Plato's text* in terms of a hypercosmic soul. But this does not mean that general metaphysical principles about procession do not demand that there should be such a thing.

*Elements of Theology* proposition 164 speaks unambiguously of an unparticipated soul that is immediately above the cosmos. This unparticipated soul seems to be hypercosmic since Proclus infers that the gods that it participates must be hypercosmic too. It is hard to know whether this soul is the same as the World

Soul (or at least its hypercosmic aspect). In any case, Proclus uses the singular. Proposition 166 uses the plural, so it might appear that there are many hypercosmic souls – not just a single unparticipated monad of all souls. Such a reading is consistent with the idea that when Socrates begins to speak of the super-celestial place at *Phdr.* 247c3, he passes from the discussion of encosmic gods to hypercosmic ones.<sup>40</sup> While proposition 164 deals with the relation between hypercosmic soul and gods, 166 concerns souls (both hypercosmic and encosmic) and intellects (whether participated or unparticipated). It would seem that hypercosmic souls mediate the participated intellects in which they share to encosmic souls. But there are also intellects – presumably participated ones? – that are encosmic and these would seem to need no mediation from hypercosmic souls. The picture is, to say the least, none too clear.

I think it is not easy to bring clarity to the relation between unparticipated or hypercosmic soul and the World Soul in Proclus. Nonetheless, it may be that his *Timaeus Commentary* sheds some light on *why* the question of the relation between them is so vexed. At *In Tim.* II 289.29–290.6 Proclus considers a potential objection to the very idea of a hypercosmic soul that is intermediate between *nous* and the World Soul.<sup>41</sup> The objection turns on the thinking activity of each. *Nous* thinks all things at once, while the World Soul thinks discursively and, moreover, thinks one thing at a time. A hypercosmic soul will have to somehow split the difference; discursively thinking many things at once. It may well be that this is something that can, in fact, be explained. I have suggested that Proclus might invoke his distinction between hypercosmic and encosmic time to explain the difference between the discursive activities of hypercosmic and encosmic souls.<sup>42</sup> Regardless of the merits of this solution – a solution perhaps available to Proclus but not explicit in his text – the puzzles that he does explicitly raise about the discursive thought of hypercosmic souls helps to explain why this is a problematic stage in the procession from intellect to encosmic souls. It is the World Soul's role, according to Proclus, to be an intermediary between intellect and the sensible. But intellect's characteristic activity is non-discursive *noësis* while soul seems linked to discursive *dianoia*. One approach is to grasp the nettle and refuse to posit an intermediary for the intermediary. This seems to be the position of Syrianus, if indeed Klitenic Wear is right to infer that he conflated the hypostasis Soul with the World Soul. Another approach is to accept the World Soul's mediation of *nous* to Nature itself requires a mediator between *nous* and World Soul.

<sup>37</sup> *In Tim.* II 241.29–242.2.

<sup>38</sup> *In Tim.* II 241.15–23.

<sup>39</sup> Klitenic Wear, S.: 'Syrianus' Teaching on the Soul', 182.

<sup>40</sup> Iamblichus, *In Phdr.* fr. 1 = Hermias, *In Phdr.* 10.7–8 (Lucarini / Moreschini).

<sup>41</sup> See also *In Tim.* III 251.32–252.9 where the same objection is entertained again.

<sup>42</sup> See Baltzly, D.: *Proclus, Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. IV, 38–41.



This is perhaps the impetus behind Iamblichus' hypercosmic soul. While Proclus' position on the interpretation of the *Timaeus* seems to go with Syrianus,<sup>43</sup> his general approach to problems in the metaphysics of procession is closer to the spirit of Iamblichus. Proclus seldom refuses the opportunity to multiply intermediate stages. The correct resolution of these competing loyalties in the case of the World Soul and hypercosmic souls remains unclear to me.

## 5 Conclusion

Proclus' conception of the World Soul's nature is largely determined by its metaphysical role as a mediator between matter and *nous*. This conception, of course, is one that is easily found in Plato's *Timaeus* and Proclus is deeply committed to the authoritative character of Plato's writing.<sup>44</sup> But there are also other conceptions of the primary metaphysical role of soul in Plato that might claim equal authority. In particular, the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* – and to some extent the *Timaeus* too – recommend a conception of it as that which enlivens the material universe. For the reasons we have discussed, Proclus prioritises the mediating role for World Soul over the enlivening one. He allocates to Nature a large part of that metaphysical work.

The other determinant of Proclus' view of the World Soul is the general framework of the unparticipated monad, the participated, and the participant that he inherits from Iamblichus via Syrianus. For the reasons we have discussed, there is a lack of clarity about Proclus' view on a hypercosmic soul prior to the World Soul. He clearly sides with Syrianus in thinking that Plato's *Timaeus* does not discuss another hypercosmic soul, distinct from and prior to the World Soul. Yet Proclus' ontology clearly includes hypercosmic souls. The exact relationship between these souls and the World Soul remains obscure – perhaps for reasons having to do with the nature of psychic versus noetic activity.

In closing, let us step back for a moment and ask ourselves why any of this really matters. Is a detailed examination of Proclus' view on the World Soul not an illustration of the saying, attributed to Harvard's Burton Dreben, that 'Philosophy is garbage, but the history of garbage is scholarship.'

At the start of this chapter I noted that Platonic idea of a World Soul that constitutes the universe as a single, living organism is not one that is obviously

recommended by our experience of our surroundings. Return to our hypothetical bushwalk introduced in section 1 where I noted that the echidna and the gum tree strike us immediately as organisms and, moreover, as distinct organisms. Their surrounding environment – the dusty earth, the rocks, the clouds, and the entire universe containing them – does not strike us as alive, nor do we immediately jump to the conclusion that it is a single organism. *Could* our perceptions of these things be transformed so that the cosmic totality could strike us as unified and alive? Could we experience the presence of a World Soul with the same immediacy that we experience the life of the echidna? Or must the majority of the sensible remain a lifeless corpse for us?

The entire corpus of Neoplatonic commentaries is exactly that – a corpse. Or more accurately (and perhaps less offensively) the commentaries we possess are textual-skeletal remains of communities of teaching and learning that aimed at the divinisation of all parties involved. The *telos*, according to the Platonists, was likeness to God and we are rendered godlike by becoming virtuous. But the various gradations of the virtues were correlated with progress through the Platonic dialogues. It seems that one was meant to acquire the virtues (and thus be rendered more divine) by reading Plato with the master of the school. Elsewhere I have hypothesized that this progress in virtue ought to be understood in terms of the acquisition of new metaphors to live by.<sup>45</sup> The teaching and learning environment that we glimpse through its textual remains aimed at self-transformation that consisted in living 'in and through' the texts of Plato. Internalising a conceptual framework and semantic association derived from their reading of Plato, the Neoplatonists aspired to be in the world in a very different way from the way in which ordinary people are in the world – indeed, a more divine way, as they supposed. If indeed Proclus achieved the highest levels of the virtues, as his biographer Marinus asserted, perhaps his experience of this hypothetical bushwalk would be very different indeed.

This suggestion raises the possibility of a very different kind of investigation of the Proclean texts than the one I have engaged in here. Here I have asked the staple questions of historians of philosophy: 'What were Proclus' views on the World Soul and how plausible were the justifications that he offered either explicitly or implicitly for those views?' A different, and necessarily much more speculative question, would be 'How would a 6<sup>th</sup> century person's experience of life be changed by the practices of teaching and learning, as well as ritual, that we glimpse through his commentaries? How would the features of these texts, like repetition or the construction of patterns, symbolism, Platonic allusions and

<sup>43</sup> In addition to *In Tim.* II 105.28–9 and 240.2–4, see also 251.31–2 and 255.1–2.

<sup>44</sup> On the nature of Plato's authority for the Neoplatonists, see Baltzly, D.: 'Plato's Authority'.

<sup>45</sup> See the introduction to Share, M. and Baltzly, D.: *Hermias: On Plato Phaedrus*.



so on, change the metaphors and pre-conceptions that shape his experience?' Answering this question would involve not merely the standard tools of philosophy, but also those of rhetorical and literary studies. *If* – as I think – the study of philosophy still aims at transforming the philosopher's way of being in the world, then perhaps posing this question might do more to make the study of the Neoplatonic commentaries relevant to contemporary concerns, even if the question is not one we are accustomed to ask.

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Marc-Antoine Gavray

## From the particular soul to the World Soul: Some puzzles in Philoponus

In the wake of Proclus' unforgiving cosmological demonstration, how could one deny the necessity of a World Soul?<sup>1</sup> Had it not become self-evident? Subsequent Platonists evidently had not the slightest doubt, and for this reason, did little more than clarify certain details that the Lycian philosopher had left unresolved, without really challenging the validity of his teachings.<sup>2</sup> Yet, with John Philoponus, we have notable exception to this orthodoxy. Rather than shore up the fringes of Proclus' theory, Philoponus instead puts it to the test in order to grasp its scope, particularly the definition of soul that underlies it.

Philoponus questions of the validity of reasoning by analogy: can one move from the World Soul to the particular soul? Should it not be the inverse? Should one not begin with particular experience, on later to determine its universality? But is the World Soul really so similar to our own? Do these two souls indeed have the same functions, the same composition, and the same nature? For instance, does the World Soul know in the same way as we do? What form of motion does it have? These are the questions raised by Philoponus, as he wonders what it means to be a soul, if one must take into account both the World Soul and the particular soul. It is thus these questions that I shall here investigate, drawing largely on two fundamental texts of Philoponus: the Commentary on the *De anima* and the treatise *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*.

1 E.g. Proclus, *In Tim.* II, 102.7–316.4. See also Dirk Baltzly's paper in this volume.

2 In truth, my research on the subject of the World Soul in post-Procline Neoplatonism turned out to be unfruitful, not to say disappointing: references to this issue are rare, even in Simplicius' Commentaries on the *Physics* and on *De Caelo*. The result is hardly different in the case of the Commentary on the *De anima* attributed to Simplicius, which remains almost silent on this issue or, at least, just paraphrases Aristotle's argument without any further reference to Neoplatonic theory (*In De anima* 27.25–31.6, on 404b8–405a7; the Soul of the Universe does not even appear in *In De anima* 40.1–47.3, commenting on 406b25–407a22, where just such a soul is mentioned). Obviously, the influence of Proclus' thought on the subject was so profound that any further development became pointless – unless the reason for this silence was simply a lack of interest.

**Note:** I thank Simon Fortier for translating this text into English. All remaining mistakes are mine. I also thank Andrea Falcon and Stephen Menn for their precious suggestions during a seminar held in McGill University. Their contribution to this paper cannot be underestimated.